

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03
NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11 IO-13
OMB-01 TRSE-00 MCT-01 HA-05 AID-05 COME-00 EB-08
LAB-04 SIL-01 /106 W
-----041479 012236Z /41

P R 011515Z JUN 78
FM AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0466
INFO AMEMBASSY MANAGUA
AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE
AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA
USCINCSO QUARRY HEIGHTS CZ
DIA WASHDC

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 1 OF 2 GUATEMALA 3221

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, PINS, SHUM, GT
SUBJECT: MORE ON CAMPESINO/MILITARY CLASH IN PANZOS

REF: GUATEMALA 3145

1. SUMMARY. GOVERNMENT EFFORTS TO DEFEND ITS ACTIONS IN THE CLASH BETWEEN SOLDIERS AND CAMPESINOS IN PANZOS (REFTTEL) WHICH LEFT AT LEAST 38 DEAD, HAVE BEEN RECEIVED WITH SKEPTICISM AND, FROM THE LEFT, OUTRAGE. SOME OF THE PRESS SIMPLY CALLS IT A CAMPESINO MASSACRE. PRESIDENT LAUGERUD HAS EMBRACED THE GUERRILLA/SUBVERSIVE PLOT LINE. MINDEF SPIEGLER HAS ADDED THE CHURCH TO THE LIST OF WOULD-BE INSTIGATORS. HOWEVER, EVEN THE PRESIDENT'S OWN COUNCIL OF STATE HAS CALLED FOR AN IMPARTIAL INVESTIGATION. THERE ARE ESSENTIALLY TWO VERSIONS: (1) CAMPESINOS WERE GATHERED IN THE TOWN SQUARE AND AT THE INSTIGATION OF
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SUBVERSIVES SOME ATTACKED A SAMALL MILITARY DETACHMENT WHICH DEFENDED ITSELF; AND (2) CAMPESINOS GATHERED PEACEFULLY IN THE SQUARE WHERE ATTACKEDSBY SOLDIERS WHO SHOT THEM DOWN AS THEY FLED. NEITHER VERSION RINGS TRUE, AND THE FACTS MAY LIE SOMEWHERE IN BETWEEN. WHAT CAN BE SAID WITH MORE CERTAINTY IS THAT A PROBLEM HAD BEEN FESTERING IN PANZOS IN RECENT MONTHS OVER LAND MATTERS;

THE MILITARY AT BEST OVERREACTED; AND PRESIDENT LAUGERUD MUST CONTEND WITH A SERIOUS EMBARRASSMENT IN HIS LAST MONTH OF OFFICE. END SUMMARY

1. IN AN IMPROMPTU PRESS INTERVIEW MAY 31, PRESIDENT LAUGERUD TRIED TO SHED LIGHT ON EVENTS IN REMOTE PANZOS MAY 29. ACCORDING TO THE PRESIDENT, THE INCIDENT WAS INSTIGATED BY THE GUATEMALAN ARMY OF THE POOR (EGP) WHICH USED TAPE RECORDINGS IN KEKCHI TO AROUSE THE INDIAN CAMPESINOS. LAUGERUD SAID THAT SOME OF THE "1,000" INDIANS ASSEMBLED IN THE TOWN SQUARE, ARMED WITH MACHETES AND HOES, ATTACKED THE MILITARY OUTPOST OF 22 SOLDIERS FROM THE REAR. THE ATTACKERS WOUNDED THE GUARDS AND TOOK THEIR WEAPONS. IN FIGHTING BACK, THE SOLDIERS KILLED SEVERAL (6-9) DEPENDING ON VERSION) WOMEN WHO HAD BEEN PLACED IN THE FRONT LINES BY THE CAMPESINO ATTACKERS. IN ALL, 38 PERSONS WERE KILLED; 13 CAMPESINOS AND 7 SOLDIERS WERE WOUNDED. OTHER OFFICIALS HAVE PROVIDED SUPPLEMENTARY DETAILS AND INSIGHTS. THE PRESIDENT'S BROTHER, HANS, WHO IS VICE PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL AGRARIAN REFORM INSTITUTE, BLAMED CAMPAIGNING POLITICIANS (IN PARTICULAR THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC VICE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE) FOR ENCOURAGING CAMPESINO LAND INVASIONS. MINISTER OF DEFENSE OTTO SPIEGELER BLAMED GUERRILLAS AND "RELIGIOUS" AGITATORS. HE DEFINED THE LATTER TO INCLUDE "ALL KINDS, MISSIONARIES AND PRIESTS OF ALL LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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RELIGIONS."

2. THE CONTRARY VERSION PRESENTED BY THE MEDIA IS BASED ON INTERVIEWS WITH VARIOUS CAMPESINO LEADERS WHO CLAIMED TO HAVE BEEN IN PANZOS, AND WITH SOME OF THE WOUNDED WHO HAVE BEEN HOSPITALIZED ELSEWHERE. AS OF MAY 30, THE PRESS HAD NOT HAD ACCESS TO PANZOS WHICH HAS BEEN CLOSED TO OUTSIDERS BY THE MILITARY. THESE SO-CALLED CAMPESINO VERSIONS VARY SOMEWHAT, BUT THE GIST IS THAT THE CAMPESINOS HAD NO INTENTION OF ATTACKING THE SOLDIERS AND THEY CARRIED NO FIREARMS. ON THE CONTRARY, THEY WERE PEACEFULLY ASSEMBLED IN THE SQUARE WHEN A GROUP OF SOME "150" SOLDIERS (AN IMPLAUSIBLE NUMBER) BROUGHT TO PANZOS AT THE INSTANCE OF LOCAL LANDOWNERS SUDDENLY ATTACKED THEM. NEITHER VERSION OF HOW IT HAPPENED APPEARS VERY LOGICAL, AND IT MAY BE THAT THE TRUTH LIES SOMEWHERE IN BETWEEN. SOME OF THE MEDIA HAVE ADOPTED THE TERM "MASSACRE" IN PREJUDGEMENT OF THE ISSUE. THEY CITE A DEATH TOLL BETWEEN 60 AND 100, ALL CAMPESINOS. THE FACT THE SOLDIERS CARRIED THEIR STANDARD AUTOMATIC RIFLES PROBABLY ACCOUNTS FOR THE LARGE TOLL OF DEAD AND WOUNDED. WHATEVER THE ACTUAL FIGURE.

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3. COMMENT. WHY WERE THE CAMPESINOS ASSEMBLED IN PANZOS?
THEY DON'T SEEM TO KNOW FOR SURE AND HAVE MADE CONFLICTING
STATEMENTS TO THE PRESS (WHICH HAS A LIMITLESS
CAPACITY TO GARBLE STORIES WITHOUT SUCH HELP). LAND
CLAIMS WERE CLEARLY AT THE ROOT OF THE INCIDENT, BUT HOW
IT DEVELOPED REMAINS MURKY. WE DO NOT RULE OUT OUTSIDE
AGITATION, INCLUDING BY THE EGP AND THE COMMUNIST PARTY,
WHOSE FASGUA LABOR ORGANIZATION HAS APPARENTLY BEEN
INVOLVED IN SOME OF THE LAND DISPUTE NEGOTIATIONS
WITH THE GOVERNMENT. THE ROLE OF THE MAYOR OF PANZOS
ALSO RAISES QUESTIONS. ALTHOUGH THE GOVERNMENT INSISTS
ITS OWN INVESTIGATION ADEQUATELY EXPLAINS MATTERS,
VARIOUS GROUPS, INCLUDING THE COUNCIL OF STATE (A
PRESIDENTIAL ADVISORY BODY), ARE CALLING FOR AN IMPARTIAL
INVESTIGATION (THAT IS, ONE MADE BY SOMEONE OTHER THAN
THE ARMY).

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4. ON MAY 8, PRENSA LIBRE REPORTED TROUBLE BREWING IN PANZOS RELATED TO LAND INVASIONS BY LANDLESS CAMPESINOS AND THE ALLEGED UNWILLINGNESS OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES TO TAKE EARLY ACTION TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM. CAMPESINO LAND DISPUTES ARE COMMON THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY. USUALLY THE AUTHORITIES HAVE MANAGED TO ACT BEFORE THE PROBLEM HAS GOTTEN OUT OF HAND, EITHER BY COWING THE CAMPESINOS OR PLACATING THEM. THEREFORE, THE FOREKNOWLEDGE OF PROBLEMS EXISTING IN PANZOS DETRACTS SOMEWHAT FROM PRESIDENT LAUGERUD'S ALLEGATION OF EGP INVOLVEMENT. AS THE PRESS IS BELATEDLY POINTING OUT, CIRCUMSTANCES WERE RIPE FOR EXPLOITATION BY ANYONE WISHING TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THEM, AND SEVERAL EDITORIALS HAVE JUXTAPOSED PANZOS WITH GUATEMALA'S RECENT ACCESSION TO THE AMERICAN CONVENTION ON HUMAN RIGHTS. FOR THE MOMENT, WHATEVER THE DETAILS OF ITS GENESIS, PANZOS ADDS UP TO A SERIOUS EMBARRASSMENT TO PRESIDENT LAUGERUD IN HIS LAST MONTH OF OFFICE. IT IS ALSO THE KIND OF DEVELOPMENT WHICH WILL PUT TO THE TEST PRESIDENT-ELECT LUCAS' PROFESSED IDENTIFICATION WITH INDIAN AND CAMPESINO CONCERNS. ANDREWS

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